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ABSTRACT

Four kinds of U.S. anti-poverty programs were analyzed in terms of their impact upon the rural poor. Examination of 13 rural Community Development Corporations (CDC) in terms of prior and present poverty of non-manager employees indicated the effect of these programs was one of merely changing the source of income rather than the stratification system, since the unemployed simply became employed in low skill, low wage jobs. A 1971 evaluation of five rural Concentrated Employment Programs indicated such programs could be characterized as manpower training for low wage work, since local institutions impeded the influx of competing industries and migration became necessary for workers to obtain adequate wage jobs utilizing their new skills. Critics have suggested that Nixon's proposed Family Assistance Plan failed because the Southern politicians recognized the fact that it was a program designed to affect the majority of the rural poor, particularly the rural black, and would, therefore, threaten the Southern status quo. Examination of rural cooperatives indicated that local business and political leaders generally opposed such efforts in order to maintain the status quo and that these same people also influenced funding. It was concluded that rural economic development programs must somehow circumvent the influence of those high on the stratification ladder. (JC)

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SOCIAL STRATIFICATION AND RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT[1]
Lessons From the Anti-Poverty Programs in the United States

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Anti-poverty programs in rural areas of the United States present a unique opportunity to study the interaction between programs for rural economic development and rural stratification systems. President Johnson (1964) in declaring total war on poverty indicated that it was done "because it is right, because it is wise, and because for the first time in our history it is possible." Indeed, the United States with its abundance of both economic and technological means would be an ideal testing ground for the ability of rural economic development to change stratification systems by, in essence, eliminating those who have so long been trapped at the bottom in rural poverty.

This paper will examine the effect of a number of anti-poverty programs in rural areas of the United States. These programs were to provide for the upgrading of those at the very bottom of the rural stratification system. The goal of lifting the rural poor out of poverty necessarily requires upward social mobility. Historically, however, upward mobility for lower status rural residents, especially in depressed rural areas, has entailed movement out of those rural areas (West, 1945; Gallaher, 1961: 204; Schwarzweller and Brown, 1967). Furthermore, structural

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[1]To be presented in Seminar 9.

opportunities in rural areas have always been limited and appear to be becoming more so (Gallaher, 1961:219; Woofter, 1969:120). Nevertheless, the increasingly limited opportunities for low status in-migrants to cities (Fuguitt, 1971) prompted the choice of rural economic development as the route of mobility for the rural poor. This choice, however, meant that these programs of rural economic development would necessarily be confronting the traditional rural stratification system.

Community Development Corporation (CDC)

Central to the present strategy of rural economic development is the Community Development Corporation (CDC) which is an outgrowth of the original war on poverty. It is a blend of the ideas of community control and individual entrepreneurship, a flexible program which some (Hampden-Turner, 1974) have heralded as the way out of poverty. Each Community Development Corporation (CDC) pursues its own goals within the overall structure, although the means may differ depending upon the local area and the local economy. Nevertheless, these programs can be evaluated in terms of the extent to which they succeeded in upgrading the economic situation of those persons at the bottom of the stratification ladder. For rural areas, the primary thrust of these programs was that of job creation. Thus, it would seem fair to judge such programs in terms of whether or not the jobs created enabled people to move out of poverty as defined by the 1970 Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) guidelines.

Sixteen rural CDC's were evaluated and information concerning the

prior and present poverty status of the non-manager employees was available for 13 of them. For these employees poverty had been reduced by an average of 5.8% with a range from 23% reduction in a rural area of California to a 0% reduction in four of the programs. In only three of the programs was a majority of those hired poor before obtaining the job and in all three a majority remained poor after obtaining the job (Abt Associates Inc., 1973a, Volume 3). On the whole, rural CDC's in contrast to urban CDC's were much more successful in creating jobs and getting people who had formerly been unemployed back into jobs; they were not successful in terms of providing jobs which could enable individuals to rise out of poverty (Abt Associates, Inc., 1973a, Volume 2:112-114). Employees of urban programs who had been employed previously experienced a wage increase of 12.5% whereas previously employed employees of rural programs experienced a wage increase of only 2.8%.

The effect of these programs was not one of changing the stratification system but one of changing the source of income. In the years covered by the survey for all 16 rural programs, there was a total of 107,712 dollars of reduction in dependency income, primarily public assistance. Individuals, then, were not lifted out of poverty but rather put back to work in low-skilled, low-paid jobs. The provision of workers to fill such jobs is, according to Gans (1972) an important positive function of poverty. Walter B. Miller's (1968) fear that the anti-poverty programs might eliminate "the low-skilled laboring class" appears unwarranted. The move from welfare dependency to low-wage work is also

predicted in the analysis of Piven and Cloward (1971). Overall the function of welfare is to regulate the labor of those in the lowest stratum of society. Low-wage work, furthermore, is a very effective mechanism of social control since it leaves little time or energy for disorderly behavior.

According to Gans (1972), other positive functions of poverty include the provision of jobs for professional "poverty warriors" and symbolic constituencies for political groups. The war on poverty provided jobs for the former function, and, through the mechanism of citizen participation, for the latter function. The experience of the rural CDC's was that over time these functions for the nonpoor increased in importance. Poor persons were hired to fill a few of the management slots in three of the seven early programs but in only one of the eight later programs. CDC's funded after 1969 were more likely to have hired managers with business experience whereas the earlier sites tended, on the average, to have less than 10% of their staff members with a business background (Abt Associates, Inc., 1973a, Volume 2:57). Furthermore, the CDC's funded after 1969 appear to place less emphasis upon involving interested citizens, but more emphasis upon involving leading citizens. The percentage of Board members "with leading positions in other economic groups had increased from an average of 75% to 90% for the rural sites" (Abt Associates, Inc., 1973a, Volume 2:50-51). Thus, there appears to be a tendency for the newer Community Development Corporations to be more likely to be controlled and staffed by individuals who have a fairly high

ranking in the social stratification systems of these rural areas. Furthermore, the rural sites were much more likely to "employ existing political structures in their efforts than were urban areas" (Abt Associates, Inc., 1973a, Volume 2:67). This would indicate that these programs in rural areas are much more confined to those definitions of the situation which are acceptable to the political and economic leadership of the community.

Concentrated Employment Program (CEP)

The Concentrated Employment Program (CEP) is one of a series of manpower programs generated out of the war on poverty. It reflects a popular position that, as indicated by Hansen (1970:157) "the greatest relative need of residents of depressed areas is for more investment in human resources and for expanded manpower programs." In the same year, however, an evaluation of five rural CEP's (Hertzlinger, 1971) clearly indicated that such programs can be characterized as "manpower training for low-wage work" (Wellman, 1974). The jobs available in rural areas are unskilled and low-wage; migration is necessary for workers who want to obtain adequate wage jobs, or to use their skill-training (Herman and Munk, 1968:30). Local businessmen have located in these areas precisely because of an abundance of unskilled, "cheap" labor (Hertzlinger, 1971:199; Rural America, Inc., 1975:41). Individuals who completed the institutional training program were more successful in obtaining steady work than drop-outs of the program although the program drop-outs showed higher wage increases (Hertzlinger, 1971:106). Where training was done by the employer on-the-job (OJT) there

is concern that employers are being reimbursed to exploit cheap labor (Hertzlinger, 1971:79), a concern expressed by the General Accounting Office about on-the-job training contracts throughout the country.[3]

In terms of the overall impact of the Concentrated Employment Program in the five rural areas the report concludes:

> CEP impact on local socio-political structures has generally been low, since the goals and strategies of the CEP rarely overlap or conflict with those of local institutions.... The potential area of conflict between CEP and local institutions arises from CEP's attempt to upgrade or relocate the poor in face of the almost universal conservatism of local institutions. Active opposition was rarely observed, however, since the CEP's impact on rural poverty in any one area is so small in relation to the vastness of the problem as to be almost unnoticeable.....
> (Hertzlinger, 1971:99).

In general, either local institutions were unaware of the program or did not cooperate with it. The one local institution which the CEP necessarily had to cooperate with, however, was the Employment Service and here a conflict did exist, growing out of a philosophical difference in attitudes. The CEP sees itself as an advocate of the poor while the Employment Service is seen instead as serving the business interests exclusively (Hertzlinger, 1971:60).

In the evaluation of the five rural CEP's the researchers examined the validity of a "stagnation conspiracy" among local business interests, that is, a desire on the part of local business to preserve the status quo and avoid any economic development which would tighten up the labor market and raise wages. The interviews with employers in the CEP areas indicated that although they were favorable toward other businesses moving in the area, this attitude was reserved for new businesses that were small, non-polluting, and male-employing. The larger firms expressed even less desire for new business. In other words, competition was not welcomed. In the Arkansas CEP, for example, residents of one town "sent threatening letters to two companies who were considering locating in the area" (Hertzlinger, 1971:150). Thus, local business interests were usually set against any major change in the economic development of their area which might result in upgrading the poor but at the same time, be costly for the employers in terms of competition both in the labor market and in other markets. The participants in the programs themselves felt this hostility of the business community. Interviewees in one of the CEP areas stated specifically that "influential figures are interested in keeping industry out, pollution down, and people on welfare" (Hertzlinger, 1971:141). It would appear that both business leaders and the participants in the program share a similar perception of what is going on: what is going on is, in fact, a preservation of the status quo.[4] The one exception to this is the view of keeping people on welfare. Here, although the participants perceive that the businesses wish to keep them on welfare, the businesses themselves indicate a preference to have these individuals earn their poverty as opposed to getting the handout.

Nixon's Family Assistance Plan (FAP)

Here is a case of a proposed program which would have had a direct effect upon the income of a majority of poor rural residents, and especially upon rural blacks in the South. Although this program did not have support from many Northern liberals, I would concur with Moynihan that the reason for its failure was due to strong opposition by Southerners on the Senate Finance Committee (Moynihan, 1973:525-529). Indeed, those most affected by FAP would have been low-wage workers in the South, especially the rural South, since the grant amount was so low it would have had little or no effect on the distribution of income in other parts of the country. Columnist Kevin Phillips saw this issue clearly: "Poor people would be better off but the middle class...could be badly hurt" as well as the "Southern cheap-labor industry" (Moynihan, 1973:377). Lester C. Maddox, then Governor of Georgia indicated that "You're not going to be able to find anyone willing to work as maids or janitors or housekeepers if this bill gets through, that I promise you" (Moynihan, 1973:378-379). Chairman Russell Long of the Senate Finance Committee evinced concern throughout the debate over FAP as to who would iron his shirts (Reported by Welsh, 1973:16).

The real issue was, of course, more than an economic one of getting the dirty work done in a way that benefited the nonpoor. It was also a question of the "socioeconomic powerbase of Dixie's conservative Democrats" (Phillips in Moynihan, 1973:377; Burke and Burke, 1974:146). This was especially true in view of the growing cooperative movement among rural blacks. The analysis of a clever reporter explained exactly how the

situation in the South might operate in terms of its effect on one family in one rural community, indicative of potential reverberations throughout the South:

> In one of the most dilapidated of the shacks...four rooms hammered together from old boards, patched in spots with cardboard, Mrs. Adie Powell lives with her nine children, her parents, her sister and her sister's six children. All these nineteen people now manage somehow to survive on $50 a week that Mrs. Powell makes on the assembly line at a local wood processing plant, the sister's welfare check of $104.00 a month and the $192.00 old-age and social security pension that Mrs. Powell's parents receive.
>
> Under President Nixon's Family Assistance Program... things would get quite dramatically better for Mrs. Powell and all of her kin. As a member of the "working poor," Mrs. Powell could draw $3,552 in cash and food stamps to augment her earnings of $2,500 at the mill. Her sister, as an unemployed welfare mother, could draw $3,316 in cash and stamps, and the parents would collect $2,640. Thus, on the effective date of the bill, July 1, 1971, annual household income would almost double overnight from $6,052 to $12,008, the sort of money now enjoyed only by the white merchant and landowner class in Alabama's black belt (Armstrong, 1970:66).

The welfare director of Georgia estimated that more than half of the families in 80 rural counties would be eligible for FAP (Armstrong, 1970: 67). Throughout the deep South there would have been a large influx of federal dollars--an estimated $134 million in Georgia alone. Yet, in the debate the Southern critics simply overlooked the possible benefits of such a program which would have poured money into the South, especially the rural South.

Rural Cooperatives

Federal involvement in attacking rural poverty through the method of organizing marketing and purchasing cooperatives has its origins in the Thirties under the administration of the Farm Security Administration (FSA). More than 25,000 poor people's cooperatives were formed under its sponsorship and 63% of their loans were completely repaid (Baldwin, 1968:203). The Farm Bureau, an organization representing middle and upper income farmers, charged the FSA with "Hurting the poor through impractical collective farming projects" and lobbied successfully for FSA's demise in 1946 (Ford, 1973:41-45). It was not until nearly 20 years later, with the rediscovery of poverty and the establishment of the Office of Economic Opportunity,that the federal government again became involved in using cooperatives to attack rural poverty. The reaction of the local business and political leaders to these programs has, however, not changed much since the Thirties and Forties.

An OEO grant of $600,000 to the Southwest Alabama Farmers Cooperative Association (SWAFCA) was strenuously resisted by city and county officials as well as local businessmen (Munk, 1967:40; Marshall and Godwin, 1971:47).

Such a grant could well affect the distribution of status and power in the community; prosperous black farmers would be in a better position than poor black farmers to organize political opposition challenging the white county and city officials. In other words, local officials and businessmen had a political and social stake in the status quo in spite of the fact that the status quo included a good deal of poverty.

In this example, moreover, those who were in a position to perceive the negative effects upon them in this program were also in a position to make an impact on the final funding decision of the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO). A delegation of Alabama's senators and four of its eight representatives expressed their opposition to the program "on behalf of 'many of the city and county officials'...as well as the owners of the major packing companies in the area" (Munk, 1967:40). The result was a reduction of funding by one-third and "a quid pro quo understanding" to sustain the governor's veto of another OEO grant to the National Sharecroppers' Fund. In an evaluation of 18 rural cooperatives, funding delays and the imposition of special conditions and modifications were related to lower cooperative income, especially in the case of the business-social cooperative where the goals included improving the social and political position as well as the economic position of its members (Abt Associates, 1973b, Table 5.11). Such funding delays and modifications were related, moreover, to the level of hostility toward the coop on the state and local levels (Abt Associates, 1973b:213). According to Marshall and Godwin (1971:39, 71-75), cooperative efforts have also been hampered by hostile action on the part of federal bureaucrats.

Much of the harassment of the cooperative efforts of poor people, however, comes from direct action on the local level. Local companies and processing plants refused to do business with SWAFCA and truck drivers transporting its crops experienced intimidation. Similar harassment from local politicians and economic competitors was found in the Grand Marie cooperative. The agricultural coops, on the whole, face problems in terms of credit discrimination and refusal to sell good land to blacks (Marshall and Godwin, 1971:47-58) as well as federal restrictions on the purchase of land (Abt Associates, 1973b:213). The Southern Consumer Cooperative suffered prolonged harassment by the local sheriff and district attorney, the net result of which was a loss of confidence and a drop in membership (Marshall and Godwin, 1971:78).[5] Overall local hostility was greatest in the business-social coops in contrast to the strictly business coops (Abt Associates, 1973b).

In the case of the Family Assistance Plan and the cooperatives of poor rural blacks and other minorities, the factor of minority status obviously played a key role. Status differences in the rural population are exacerbated by racial or ethnic differences (Raper, 1972:315). Nevertheless, similar problems emerged even when the rural population was all white. In his analysis of the Chenango Development Project conducted in Chenango County, New York, Stockdale concludes that "attempts to significantly alter the distribution of goods, services, power or prestige in rural communities will result in at least some conflict regardless of methods used," and quite consistently there was some evidence of "continual

pressure from power actors in the county and some administrators in Cooperative Extension and the Agricultural Experiment Station at Cornell to minimize the use of approaches which might generate conflict" (1974:14-18). Clearly, those in power in Chenango County did not wish to see any challenges to the status quo which currently benefits them. Not unpredictably, local elites were successful in moving the program away from serious anti-poverty efforts into the more conservative hands of the Cooperative Extension and the Administration of the College of Agriculture (Stockdale, 1973:10).

In the Kentucky mountains, again a case of an all white population, a survey of local elites found that bankers, physicians and white collar managers were quite skeptical about the poor having some input into the planning process of anti-poverty programs (Plunkett and Bowman, 1973: 43-44). Although local public officials in the survey were somewhat more favorable towards the participation of the poor, the reaction of local officials to the earlier anti-poverty programs was instrumental in assisting the lobbying efforts behind the 1967 Green amendment of the Economic Opportunity Act which placed final program control directly in their hands (Plunkett and Bowman, 1973:87). Even where participation of the poor is required for Local Development District decisions the local elites can easily out-vote them (Rothblatt, 1971:157). For the Appalachian case Walls concludes that the regional development model ends up as "a rationalization of existing structures of privilege" (1976:iii).

In general, rural anti-poverty programs were either rendered ineffective from the outset or, when they threatened to become effective, were subject to local harassment, state or federal modification, delay, funding cuts or veto or the total reorientation of the program. The well-publicized initial success of the California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA) in suits on behalf of farm workers and the rural poor led to a storm of protest and influenced the reorganization of the Legal Services program. It is too soon to tell the exact effect of this reorganization which went into operation in the Fall of 1975, but strong pressure was exerted to reduce the role of the back-up centers which had provided the crucial research for the more controversial cases.[6]

Conclusion

Examining the history of poverty in England T. H. Marshall concludes that "The common purpose of statutory and voluntary effort was to abate the nuisance of poverty without disturbing the pattern of inequality of which poverty was the most obvious consequence" (quoted in Coser, 1971:487). The above analysis of the anti-poverty programs in the 1960's and 1970's suggests that, in fact, the same principle is still operant: The nuisance being high welfare or high unemployment, the resolution being low-wage work, but the pattern of inequality remaining the same. When a phenomenon such as poverty persists in spite of forces presumably designed to eliminate it, a functional explanation is called for according to Stinchcombe (1968:83). The basic characteristic of a functional explanation is that the consequences of a social arrangement are essential

elements of the causes of that social arrangement (Stinchcombe, 1968:80), or, in other words, the consequences of poverty are essential elements of its causes. Central to this type of functional analysis is the concept of want; that is how the consequences form the essential elements of the cause--they are wanted. Those who want the consequences of a social arrangement are thereby motivated to act in such a way as to bring about its existence or persistence.

Much of the analysis of poverty in the 1960's can be understood in terms of a functional explanation: poverty persists because it is the way of life wanted by the poor. This value placed upon a culture of poverty by the poor then causes poverty. The poor are socialized into a motivational structure which leads them to want the life style of poverty and to ignore those opportunities by which they could lift themselves out of poverty (Ball, 1968; Lewis, 1968). Employers of the poor, as well as personnel in the CEP's cite the importance of "re-orienting the enrollee's motivation and work attitudes" as a key contribution of rural manpower programs (Hertzlinger, 1971:38). This, however, is only to have the rural poor work harder and more steadily at their low-wage job, not to foster upward mobility. The evaluation report cautions against programs which might lead the poor to expect something better.

Research among the poor, both surveys and ethnographies, however, overwhelmingly refute the idea that the poor want their poverty (Bould-Vantil, 1976; Goodwin, 1972). There is no aspirational culture of

poverty (Gans, 1968). Thus, the source of the want which causes poverty must be those who are not themselves poor. Moynihan has explicitly recognized that the non-poor ought rationally to want poverty. He cautions his audience of affluent political liberals against any rash elimination of poverty and the creation of a more equal society:

> There are doubtless those among us so ungrateful, or so idealistic, as to wish or to be willing to give it all up in favor of a regime not yet more generous in its distribution of worldly and psychic goods. But there is none of us, I repeat, who would not in fact have something considerable of both of these to lose in the exchange.
> (Moynihan, quoted in Valentine, 1968:41).

For Moynihan, more than just money is at stake. A more equal society would mean a loss of relative status as well for those who are currently benefiting from existing inequalities (see also Gans, 1972:281). Furthermore, in a system of unequal distribution of material rewards, those who benefit from the system can view their material rewards as reflections of their inherent worth.

It is no doubt true that the operation of anti-poverty programs in rural areas is limited by available resources, in terms of personnel and technical assistance, as well as by a generalized hostility toward federal intervention, especially in the business community. Nevertheless, the problems of inadequate personnel and generalized hostility at the local

level seem to be reserved primarily for programs that might change the status quo--i.e., those programs which would increase the political and economic power of the poor. There appears to be no problem of local support for other federal programs to improve the standard of living in rural areas. The "successful" programs such as the Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) and the farm subsidies and price supports, however, are those which provide substantial benefits to the better-off farmers with minimum assistance to the poor (The President's Commission on Income Maintenance Programs, 1970:289-290). For FmHA loans or grants, ranging from $349 million to $160 million during the years 1961-1966, one estimate is that only $50 million benefited the poor and of the total Department of Agriculture budget of $7 to $8 billion annually only a few hundred thousand dollars are allocated to problems of poverty (Bonnen, 1966:454). Marshall and Godwin (1971:13) conclude, moreover, the the agricultural programs have worsened the situation of the small farmer in the South. In the Southwest, the effect of the FmHA program among Spanish-Americans was, in fact, increasing the poverty of the poor farmer due to land foreclosures (Knowlton, 1974:11).

The original intent of the farm programs developed during the 1930's was to help the needy farmer. There is some evidence, furthermore, that these original programs operated first by the Resettlement Administration (1935) and later by the Farm Security Administration (1937) were, in fact, successful in reaching poor farm families (Cochrane, 1965:195). Unfortunately for the rural poor, these programs were probably too

successful and were, in the words of one FSA Director of Information, "...counter to the established economy" (quoted in Baldwin, 1968:263). Powerful opposition resulted in the reorganization of the programs under the FmHA in 1946, and the radical features of the program, including loans to cooperatives, were eliminated (Tweeten, 1970:398). The primary reason that the FmHA programs "worked" and the anti-poverty programs did not was that the latter were a challenge to the status quo while the former were not.

Programs for rural economic development which propose important changes in the rural stratification system must somehow learn to circumvent the actions and influence of those higher on the stratification ladder whose interests lie in the preservation of the status quo (Groenman, 1969). While this is, no doubt, a problem for all economic development, it is especially true in rural areas because of high visibility and greater potential impact due to limited population and lower levels of living in rural areas. Policy planners must either insure that development efforts can operate in spite of the opposition of local government and business, or provide for the development of a political power base among the target population so that they can insure the survival of their program without compromising its goals. This implies that a major contribution of social scientists to problems of rural economic development would be their analysis of local rural stratification systems and the development of intervention strategies to take cognizance of the possible local resistance.

FOOTNOTES

2. Rural Community Development Corporations were found to be more visible than their urban counterparts. (Abt Associates, Inc., 1973a, Volume 2:67).

3. The General Accounting Office concluded that "OJT Contracts had served primarily to reimburse employers for OJT which they would have conducted even without the Government's financial assistance. These contracts were awarded even though the intent of the program was to induce new or additional training efforts beyond those usually carried out" (Quoted in Wachtel, 1971:13).

4. Hansen (1970:299) similarly cautions against the industrialization approach in rural areas because of the resistance of local leaders (see also Groenman, 1969).

5. Handicraft cooperatives which sell to distant markets are less threatening to local businessmen. Here the problem is primarily one of substandard wages. Even the successful Dakotah Handcrafts has only recently been able to pay the minimum wage.

6. The courts have also participated in this reorganization by limiting the potential effect of class action suits, especially as they apply to the poor (Girth, 1976).

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